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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, May 16, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOUSEFLY FACTS." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Some of the troubles of this world we can manage very well by ourselves. And some we can only overcome with the help of other people. One common, everyday, hot-weather trouble requires both individual and group fighting. I'm mentioning it today because the battle hour has arrived. In other words, our enemy, the housefly, is out for the summer.

Once upon a time -- and not so very long ago either -- we all thought of flies as just nuisances. Nobody liked to be bothered by them, of course, but nobody worried about them. Some houses had wire-screened doors and windows to keep them out, but many people felt that screens were rather a luxury after all. Grocers sold fly-paper and that was cheaper than screens -- sheets of brown paper coated with a sticky substance that occasionally caught the family cat as well as the fly and that absent-minded people sometimes sat in or laid their hats on. Back in those days, if a fly fell in a bowl of cream, you just fished him out and used the cream just the same. Flies crawled on the table and over the food. Somebody shooed them off occasionally but the food was eaten. Some people had home-made fly-swatters and paper "fly-dusters," but in general everybody tolerated flies as just one of the harmless annoyances of summer.

You see, few people knew much about the life and habits of the fly and we didn't guess what a health menace this common insect was.

To be sure, wise people had suspected him for generations. As far back as the sixteenth century, medical literature mentioned the probable relationship between flies and disease. But in 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the evidence against the fly really came out. In military camps that year about one-fifth of the army contracted typhoid. The board of military officers that investigated the cause of the widespread fever reported that flies brought greater loss to our soldiers than the entire Spanish army. Since then scientists have found plenty of other damaging evidence against the fly. It has been responsible year after year for spreading dread infantile diarrhea which has caused the death of so many babies in summer. In fact, this one insect probably carries about thirty diseases of various kinds.

Well, the workers in the Department of Agriculture who have made a special study of this filthy but common pest say that its control is up to the public. A few health officers can't control such a universal insect. It's up to both the individual and the community.



Here's why. Flies breed in open filth -- manure, decaying garbage, unsanitary dumping grounds, dirty horse stables, pig sties and chicken yards as well as other filthy places. They won't be about unless they can find such places to breed. You can help control them by making sure that no such material is exposed on your premises. But you'll have flies just the same unless your neighbor also keeps his property clean. Flies have been known to travel as far as thirteen miles. Cooperation in the fight is necessary to down them.

Many cities have cut down their fly population by sanitary laws about disposal of garbage. Then, cities no longer have the problem of horse manure as fly breeding grounds since the street car and auto have supplanted the horse. In fact, the time may not be far distant when people living in clean cities won't need screens at their windows to keep out flies.

But in small towns and on farms fly control is much more difficult. You can see why. The farmer can't remove all manure from his premises twice a week. That manure is valuable to him. His problem is to find some method of disposal or storage that will conserve the fertilizing value of the manure and yet prevent the breeding of flies.

Workers at the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine advise the daily spreading of the manure on the fields or treating the manure pile with chemical substances that will kill both the eggs and maggots of the house fly. One substance that does this job well is hellebore. Another is powdered borax. But I'm not going into all the details of doing away with flies in their infancy. If you or the man of your family is interested, you can have a little booklet on the subject, free of charge, by writing to the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D.C. The name of the bulletin is "The House Fly and How to Suppress It" and the number is 1408. In the pages of the bulletin you'll find all the secrets of the house fly's unpleasant private life. Also you'll find details about good fly traps and sprays and poisons.

What impressed me most on reading this bulletin was the fact that though we're all so familiar with this insect, most of us know very little about his dangerous ways and the best methods of getting rid of him.

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